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View from the shop floor

Informing the Police Educational Qualification Framework: Graduate Perspectives of the Police Now Leadership Development Programme

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Background

Using the Police Now Leadership Programme as a 'test bed', we have explored through in-depth, individual and focus groups interviews, the experiences of 45 graduate entrants to policing. We describe their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the graduate programme, how they have coped with the learning and their neighbourhood placements and how they understand, value and apply research evidence to their practice and through assessed impact projects. We use these interview data to 'flesh out' the findings from WP6 on how graduates assess their capabilities over time and we examine the views of police line mangers on graduates' skills and abilities compared to those officers recruited in the standard way. We use these data to draw out key learning points to help inform the structure and development of a graduate entry route into policing, in particular the integration of the learning and practice elements of a graduate programme.

This chapter addresses three key questions:

- How do graduates experience the short intensive policing course?
- How do graduates learn the essential craft of policing?
- How do graduate police officers apply their critical skills, gleaned from both their university study and the summer academy, to the demands of their neighbourhood police work; and what is the role of evidence based policing here?

Methods

The research was conducted between July 2016 and December 2017. The main components were:

- 60 in-depth qualitative interviews with 45 Police Now participants, (30 from Cohort 2 and 15 from Cohort 3)
- Seven observations of Police Now training days and 100-day impact events;
- 13 interviews with police line managers of graduates;

- Eight qualitative interviews with Police Now Leadership Development Officers and curriculum, development and executive staff;
- Two focus groups to examine the views, perceptions and usefulness of training on evidence-based policing; seven participants per group (N=14); and
- Content review of Police Now Graduates' 100-day impact projects (N=30)

We used a semi-structured interview schedule to discuss with interviewees their rationale for applying to Police Now, their experiences of the programme, including the initial training course and neighbourhood placement, and their understanding of evidence-based policing and perceptions about how this was developed and applied to their practice. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by the telephone, recorded and transcribed. A primary coding frame was developed, based on the key interview topics. This was refined by further 'sub-coding' within each of these main categories.

Our interviewees

Cohort 2 interviewees comprised 15 female and 15 male graduates who were interviewed six months after the Summer Academy 2016 (N=30) and again at one year (N=15). They were aged between 21 – 32 years at the time of interview, with 23 describing their ethnicity as White British. The remainder (n=7) were from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) groups. Graduates came from a range of academic disciplines, including: law, criminology, the natural, social and political sciences, music, foreign languages, engineering, war studies, history and geography. Six graduates had relatives who were currently, or had previously worked as a police officer or police staff, and five had previous policing experience themselves. Fourteen were subsequently employed by the Metropolitan Police Service[1], six by West Midlands Police, three by Lancashire, two respectively by Cheshire, Surrey and Thames Valley Police and one by Northamptonshire Police.

Cohort 3 interviewees comprised six female and nine male graduates who were interviewed between six and 12 weeks after leaving the Summer Academy in 2017. Their ages ranged from 21 to 26 years, with 13 describing their ethnicity as white British, one Asian, and one preferred not to have his ethnicity recorded. Like Cohort 2 they had degrees in a range of subjects including: law, geography, psychology, chemistry, politics, sports science and war studies. Five had family members who were currently or had previously been serving police officers or staff.

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[1] The Metropolitan Police Service was the only police force to participate in Cohort 1, thereafter the Police Now programme was opened up to all other police forces.

The Police Now Programme

Police Now is not a graduate conversion course, there are, however, some important similarities between the Police Now programme and the proposed graduate conversion course currently being developed by the College of Policing. Namely, the training of graduates for a career in policing, training graduates in a different way to traditional police recruits and placing a greater emphasis on promoting an evidence-based approach to policing. Its publicity material states that it "exists to transform communities, reduce crime and increase the public's confidence in policing". The aim of the programme is to recruit and develop "an outstanding and diverse group of individuals to be police officers and leaders, working on the front line and contributing to wider society"[2]. The programme consists of a six-week Summer Academy (hereafter SA) "designed and delivered by outstanding, high performing frontline police officers…it is underpinned by a comprehensive pre-learn course so that participants have the legal and procedural knowledge they need to hit the ground running as well as a period of one-to-one mentoring afterwards"[3]. Police Now describes the Academy as "innovative, dynamic, inspiring and challenging". (Police Now, 2015)

Our findings

Interviewees experiences of the Summer Academy

There are obvious expectations of graduates and the skills they bring to Police Now; their degrees convey an ability for higher-level learning and critical thinking. They undertake a shorter six-week introductory course to policing than traditional entry police recruits and are expected to undertake some of that learning independently.

Police Now graduates are required to complete an on-line, pre-learning course, the content of which is predominantly on the law and an officer's legal powers. On the first day of the SA the graduates sit an exam, which they must pass to progress onto the six-week academy. Most of Cohort 2 and 3 passed the exam at the first attempt. None of the interviewees reported the pre-learn to be too difficult. They were happy to cover these 'basics' independently - most had recently completed their final university exams so were used to pressurised learning and exam conditions – and viewed the pre-learn as a good foundation for entering the policing profession and starting the SA. The few who failed the exam blamed too short a period of time between finishing their university exams and starting the Academy.

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[2] https://www.policenow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Police-Now-Programme-Booklet.pdf
[3] Police Now https://www.policenow.org.uk/forces/summer-academy/ .

As far as I can remember the majority of the learning was legislation. There were also modules about values and ethics, I think there was one about styles of neighbourhood policing. The vast majority was factual stuff that you could just learn by rote almost. Anything that was a bit more nuanced was stuff that we got taught in the classroom, as it were, when we got to the academy. [PNG26]

The pre-learn was primarily preparation, for the exams. It was helpful, it meant when we went in we weren't completely dithering like, "What am I doing?" I thought it was good, it was reasonable. It certainly did what it was meant to do. [PNG19]

I didn't do much prep work due to going away, exams and finishing essays, I failed the first exam, but passed the re-take 48 hours later [PNG10]

The Summer Academy comprised three distinct but complementary training strands: lectures and classroom-based activities; officer safety training: and field training. Lectures are delivered by both guest speakers and serving police officers and cover topics including: stop and search; roads and breath testing; values, legitimacy and ethics; female genital mutilation; fraud and cybercrime; humility, toxicity and communication; evidence-based policing; mental health; sex offences and domestic abuse. Lecture length varied from one to four hours. Graduates were placed in a syndicate for the duration of the Academy. A syndicate was comprised of a lead, who was an experienced operational police officer, and 10-12 graduates. Syndicates sat as a group for lectures, worked through exercises in the classroom, and completed their field training together[4].

In late 2017, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) published their final evaluation report detailing the experiences of the first Police Now Cohort (Yesberg and Dawson, 2017). The views of Cohort 1 officers on their experience of the SA were similar to those of our Cohort 2 and 3 interviewees. Like Cohort 1, our interviewees spoke positively about the training they received at the SA, commenting positively on the fact that most of the speakers were 'serving' police officers:

The session organisation was great, I thought the depth was quite good, they got across the points they needed to and they brought in people who were still doing it… current serving officers, serving sergeants, serving inspectors, people who are top of their field who know everything that is current. That was the most important thing because it showed that what we were learning is the best working practice used by people who are still practising and working [PNG05].

However, like Cohort 1, many of the interviewees were dissatisfied with the balance of learning at the Summer Academy. A key theme in our interviews was the importance for the

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[4] Although there were xx graduates in Cohort 3 (xx more than in Cohort 2) the syndicate structure stayed the same for both Cohorts.

graduates of learning the craft of policing. They valued the sessions that covered practical or craft skills more than those which focused on the so called 'soft skills[5]' or theories of policing, often worrying that there was too much emphasis on the latter. Importantly, our first interviews with graduates, and therefore their reflection on the SA, was done after they had been in force for several months. Their views about their own competency when starting in force were generally low, in particular they stressed their lack of confidence in policing skills (McDowall et al, 2018):

> *They put a lot of emphasis on the soft skills, as it were. We had a four hour lesson, I think, on resilience which I didn't really take a whole lot away from. Compare that to, say, a one hour lesson on sexual offences, not that we're going to be dealing with a whole lot of that in our capacity as neighbourhood officers. I felt it was sometimes lacking in terms of giving us a rounded view.* [PNG32]

> *In terms of the content, there was a lot of debate amongst us that there wasn't enough time being spent on particular things, some things were being sacrificed for other things. So I think our input on traffic law was probably two or three hours, whereas we would talk about resilience and soft skills for days on end. And that would be a constant thing, but when you start the job, you think back and wish that the practical aspects and stuff such as traffic law and stop and search, you wish that had been covered more…I think they really pushed soft skills, you know, reflection, the management toolkit they call a 'resilience toolkit', they really pushed that….* [PNG28]

Like Cohort 1 (Yesberg and Dawson, 2017), most interviewees found the six-week course intensive and exhausting, some noting that the days were too long, and the balance of learning biased towards lectures-style teaching rather than discussion and field training which they largely preferred:

> *The days were so long; sometimes you were in one room for five hours with hardly any breaks. Your brain just can't concentrate for that long. A lot of stuff you don't even remember that you had a talk about it because there were just so many talks, so many lessons and so much sitting and listening that it just all kind of merges into one sometimes. We didn't get much reflection time at the SA.* [PNG09]

> *The field training was very good, which is the bit where you actually go out, in [police] cars. You learn things that you just can't learn in a classroom. The lectures were good, predominantly good, but long. The days were long and for my money eight weeks would be a more appropriate time just for making everything easier... It was a bit like death by PowerPoint for quite a lot of it to be honest with you.* [PNG16]

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[5] Officers tended to refer to sessions such as legitimacy, procedural justice, empathy, resilience as 'soft skills' sessions. It was unclear why these sessions were referred to as soft, as for many these are the skills which many officers find particularly difficult to master.

I would have rather had more classroom-based discussions, I thought the hall was really good as that's when you're getting the experts to come and talk to you, that's where you're getting the knowledge being passed to you. But for me, I think it's partly the way that I learn, it's not really hammered home until I get into a group and just sort of talk about it. So what I would have liked is to have slightly shorter hall sessions and slightly more classroom sessions. [PNG18]

Understanding the relationship between theory and its practical application and how best to design a graduate course which integrates these successfully has been examined by colleagues *(*Belur at al*.,* Agnew Pauley and Belur, 2018) as part of this research project. Interviews conducted with key stakeholders from the teaching, social work and law professions found that graduate conversion courses which neglect this relationship ultimately limit a student's professional development and in the long term, compromise their future professional trajectories (Agnew Pauley and Belur, 2018). We found limited understanding among some interviewees about *why* each element of the SA is included and how the theoretical learning informs policing practice, and a frequently cited preference for more opportunities for discussion of issues raised in lectures.

From graduate to police officer – the learning environment in force
After completing the SA officers are deployed to their home force to start a 28 day immersion. Each force is expected to organise a force specific training input (usually one week in length), to acclimatise graduates to local procedures, policies and ICT systems. For the remaining three weeks, graduates are expected to accompany a tutor/mentor to continue their professional development, including practical skills, and to learn about their local area and the priorities of their team. This transition is of particular interest in order to examine the coordination of learning and practice between Police Now and the host forces. We sought feedback about:

- The information provided to local neighbourhood teams from PN and Force Learning and Development Departments;
- The arrangements put in place to ensure a smooth transition from the SA to neighbourhood policing teams; and
- The support provided by the host force, including the reception from police colleagues.

Interviewees from Cohort 2 and 3 had mixed experiences of transition. While most reported a *relatively* smooth transition, in that their new colleagues were aware they were arriving, others described this aspect of the programme as poorly managed and their team and line managers as ill-informed about Police Now, its aims and remit. Our interviews with police

line managers supported this view in that several complained of having very little knowledge or information about the graduate scheme or understanding about the skill set their new colleague would arrive with:

> *Yes, my team were aware, which is always a good thing; in fact most of the station was aware that a Police Now graduate was arriving, my colleagues were aware of what Police Now is but I think we might have been miss-sold to them slightly. They were expecting this all singing all dancing, ready to go, problem solving, impressive, best human there is in the whole planet. We arrived, and we literally couldn't do anything in terms of policing, which is quite an essential part of the job; but I guess that's something you learn through experience and actually doing it. We weren't the all singing all dancing problem solving extraordinaires they were expecting.* [PNG17]

> *Yes my team were aware. I was really lucky because I had had a previous conversation with the Inspector who organised my arrival, so that really helped. I got to know my Sergeant and the officer that would be tutoring me as well. It was all really, really helpful. I said to my own HR team here that, "I think it would be really good if future officers were given that experience as well."* [PNG125]

> *Some of my team knew I was arriving some didn't, same with the senior management, some knew, some have only just come to terms with it, literally.* [PNG127]

> *I don't think anyone was aware I was arriving… My new sergeant is very anti Police Now.* [PNG19]

Police Now has made various efforts to improve communication with the host forces, for example by inviting line managers to the SA - although this offer was not taken up by all – and introducing Leadership Development Officers who can act as a point of contact between graduate and force and iron out problems as they arise.

Mentors
Graduates are expected to be supported in neighbourhood teams in the first instance by a trained mentor/tutor. Mentoring is an important element of graduate conversion [Belur et al, 2018]. Unfortunately, not all graduates were assigned a mentor, and some reported only limited access to one; for example, available only on some shifts or for a limited number of shifts. It was also unclear what training 'mentors' had been provided with to undertake this important role. Line manager interviewees also raised this issue, noting that they were restricted in who they could ask to mentor the PN graduates because of limited staff availability and resources. Most mentors were neighbourhood colleagues.

Our interviewees descriptions of mentoring varied, with some reporting very positive experiences, often highlighting the support, pastoral care and neighbourhood knowledge

which their mentor possessed. Those who were less enthusiastic tended to complain about their mentor's lack of interest in Police Now or understanding of their supporting role:

> *My mentor was brilliant, she was really good. She just showed me the ropes of what we were doing. Youth engagement is very different from beat management so she took me out to the schools and she showed me how we operated, which was good. I know one of my friends had a really bad time because his mentor wasn't about for the entire induction period. I felt pleased that mine was and she was so good.* [PNG17]

> *They were welcoming, but it would have been nice to have a mentor, or someone who pointed out what I was doing wrong, or spent a little bit more time with me explaining things. I felt quite frustrated in the first few weeks, because I didn't really know how to use any of the systems on the computer. Almost, you feel like a bit of a burden continuously asking questions. You don't want to ask the same person questions so many times, you are a bit useless or whatever. Yes, it would have been nice to have a bit more there.* [PNG41]

> *We came in and we said, "We're supposed to have this 28 day period. What do you want us to do in it?" they were like, "Oh, I'm happy for you to start in your roles." At the time we were like, "Okay, that's fine. We'll start in our roles as neighbourhood officers." Probably in retrospect, it would have been more useful to me to request to be put on a different team for a bit, or maybe just be on response for a little bit.* [PNG 33]

Line managers' experience of the PN Programme

A graduate's experience of policing, regardless of entry route, is often shaped by the dominant culture of their team and immediate line manager. Line managers who had visited the Summer Academy and met their recruit beforehand, unsurprisingly, had a much better understanding of the skills and competency of their recruit and what additional support would be required. Line managers' accounts of supervising PN graduates tended to focus on the need to increase practice competency to achieve independent patrol status. Being abstracted from neighbourhood work to attend Police Now events or further training was sometimes perceived as an impediment to achieving these core policing skills and they were generally considered by line managers to be less practice ready that those officers coming via the standard entry. However, line mangers were also mainly of the view that Police Now graduates were quick learners and highly competent individuals who showed good initiative.

Our line manager interviewees were critical both of the Police Now team and their own force Learning and Development Departments (L&DD) for a lack of clarity or communication about how the transition and mentoring process should be managed and what was expected of

them as line managers[6]. Most were also ill-informed about the focus and aims of abstraction days, highlighting disconnect between key parties involved in managing the programme.

Integrating into the neighbourhood team

A key theme in our graduate interviews was their efforts to integrate into neighbourhood policing teams. In some cases, they described how they sought to manage the perceived stigma of being a graduate in policing, and often to underplay any sense of difference between themselves and colleagues coming into policing from other routes:

> *The stigma that comes with graduate is the idea that you think you know everything and you think you know how to be a Police officer. I was so conscious that I didn't know how to be a Police officer, I didn't want to give them any way of being able to say, "Oh well, she just comes in and thinks she knows everything. She can't even do a proper stop and search.* [Participant, Focus Group, 1]

> *Yes, they knew they were getting someone from Police Now, but they didn't know what Police Now was, no-one had ever told them what it was. I think they were sceptical to start with, but they said I wasn't how they expected me to be, they expected someone who thought they knew everything, a typical graduate… Yes, just as I expected them to be really old men stuck in their ways.* [PNG121]

Most were keen to emphasise and often to defer to colleagues' professional experience and to acknowledge the importance of that experience for informing their day-to-day work and their PN impact assessments (discussed below) of what interventions might be implemented and tested locally.

> *[with] Police Now, we were taught, "You've got these ideas. Go and do it," but, equally, I think it's important to reflect on the fact that our colleagues have probably done that before or have experiences of [place], that problem or people.* [PNG25]

> *My colleagues have got a lot more experience than me. In my opinion, they are the best source of learning, for me.* [PNG04]

> *they've got the experience of trying it in the field so if I read something and I'm having a think about something and then I chat to them about it, it's given me much more knowledge and understanding of how that could possibly work in practice.* [PNG17]

> *Fundamentally, I might be better educated than anyone else in my office, but they're better police officers than I am right now, and it would be arrogant of me to think otherwise.* [PNG04]

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[6] Line managers who had not attended the SA had less knowledge about both the PN Programme and what needed to be put in place for the continued professional development of their graduate.

When you come out of university you know how to be a Uni student, not a police officer, not a community leader, you just know how to work efficiently; work, study and write things efficiently. [PNG05]

There were some who expressed more confidence in their ability to challenge or question colleagues, and of note was the reported autonomy given to most interviewees about how they might choose to respond to different neighbourhood issues. Although, sometimes this was thought to signal a lack of interest or supervision from line managers:

I've probably got quite a lot of autonomy to be honest. I mean we normally, as a team, will discuss what's going on, what problems we've got. Therefore, you get the advice of your colleagues and their input and stuff. Generally, if it's something that I'm taking the lead on, as long as I can argue my case so to speak, my sergeant is very supportive with how I want to deal with that. [PNG04]

Yes I do, I feel like I'm given the choice to tackle it however I want. To be honest, I've felt, maybe at times, I've felt like I had a bit too much. I felt a bit under-supervised, in terms of like, "Well go on then, solve the problem." You're like, "Oh, I don't know how." [PNG26]

I've got a lot of autonomy in terms of how I want to approach problems. I could go to my sergeant with any kind of idea, as long as it's somewhat sensible they'd probably be happy for me to crack on with it. I do feel like I have autonomy, and my input is taken in. However, obviously, the more experienced neighbourhood officers do get the final say. But, as a team, I think we get a lot of autonomy. [PNG41]

Most graduates described their neighbourhood colleagues as generous with their time, keen to explain processes and systems and happy to help. A minority reported receiving a more cynical and cautious reception from colleagues, which they worked hard to turn around. Further, there was little opportunity for critical reflection within teams either because this was not normal team practice or because work pressure meant time for reflection was difficult to achieve in any meaningful or routine way.

No. I must say I've only spoken to my sergeant once or twice properly, because she's so busy. I feel like I'm almost being managed by this colleague of mine. Or not really being managed at all. Which is quite nice as well. So not really. [*PNG40*]

Not really. Most of the time if I'm out with my colleague and we've dealt with something, or given out a warning or whatever, we come back, we speak to the sergeant and say, oh we did this and that, and explain what happened, and that's it. There's not really a discussion with the team. Everybody does their own thing, so there is no kind of team discussion about anything. [PNG33]

Unfortunately I'm mainly left to my own devices in my neighbourhood. So ultimately I've got to pull the strings and try and pull everything together, the problem is I don't always know what strings to pull. So I'm always feeling that I can only respond to

certain situations with the tools that I've been given and I know there's a much wider range of tools out there that I could be applying to community engagement, it's just that I'm missing out on them and ultimately what I could achieve. [PNG05]

The role of evidence-based policing

In this next section we examine how Police Now Graduates understand, value and apply research evidence to their practice during neighbourhood placements, through assessed impact projects. The broader context of police professionalisation is pertinent as is the College of Policing's role in setting professional standards and promoting good practice based on evidence – including the aim to create a more autonomous workforce, who can exercise judgement and knowledge of what works (Neyroud, 2010; Laycock and Tilley, 2017; College of Policing, 2015). Police leaders are supportive of evidence-based practice and are expected to encourage reflective practice and engagement with research (National Police Chiefs Council, 2016; College of Policing, 2015). The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction – hosted by the College of Policing - is developing and promoting the professional knowledge base and is a repository for quality research evidence on what works and of good professional practice. However, positive orientation to evidence informed policing is not yet evident at all levels of the service and most readily supported by more senior staff (Hunter, May and Hough, 2018). This makes the quality of the practice 'learning environment' for graduates highly relevant to this research. As noted above, Belur et al (2017), in their rapid assessment of models of graduate professional conversion, noted the importance of integrating theoretical elements with practice skills and the significance of mentoring and supervision as part of that integration process.

The *100-day impact projects*[7] are intended to demonstrate graduates' problem-solving and critical thinking skills and are a means of applying evidence-based practice to address local neighbourhood issues. Each graduate is expected to complete up to five projects over the course of the two-year programme, and to present projects in a variety of formats at 'impact' events. This is a core assessed element of Police Now and is used to demonstrate to host forces, the potential added value and 'impact' of a Police Now graduate to the neighbourhood team.

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[7] The projects are so named because graduates are asked to consider: *What is the most impactful think you have done in your neighbourhood to reduce crime and increase the public's confidence in policing during the last 100 days?* Projects entail graduates' identifying problems in their neighbourhoods, designing an intervention approach and measuring the impact of that approach.

Perceptions of the importance of evidence-based practice

As noted in earlier chapters, the Summer Academy training programme included only one half-day session on evidence-based practice, which was augmented in 2017 by a further full day of skills training, focusing on defining evidence, showing how research can inform practice and different evaluation methods. This also allowed graduates to discuss their impact projects with an 'expert' panel and encouraged them to champion the use of evidence and evaluation amongst their colleagues. This extra training was found to deepen graduates understanding of evidence-based practice, to make clearer how to identify problems and underlying causes, and where to find different sources of relevant research evidence to inform and test interventions (McDowall et al.,2018). Our focus group interviews conducted after this training supported these findings, with participants showing good understanding of, and support for, evidence-based practice – one participant described the session as "preaching to the choir"- but they also reported various barriers they faced in promoting research in their force. The extracts below, for example, highlight competing priorities for their time and the cynicism expressed by some colleagues and managers about research or new ideas and approaches to age old neighbourhood problems:

> *It's all very well saying, "you do have the time, make the time." Well actually, you can't make time, and when you've got your skipper going, "You're doing this, then this, then this," actually you can't make time unless you stay on after work. So, I thought that was a little bit glib and slightly pie in the sky. Not understanding the realities of modern policing.* [Participant, Focus Group 2]

> *I think it* [EBP] *is really important, because that's the only way that workplaces change. If everybody only goes by what our predecessors do, it does end up being quite a backwards organisation that doesn't really take on new things. I think, it is good to let new people have a say, from a fresh, outsider perspective of what needs to change, or what needs to be done. But, it is difficult being vocal in that sense, because you are new.* [PNG41]

> *I love evidence based policing. My whole Master's was pretty much that. So when we had the lecture on it I was just loving life, and everyone was like, "Okay." (Laughter) Yes, I just think there's not time for it. Like we were saying before, that officers probably wouldn't have time to read and research, but I'm really keen on that, and learning* [PNG40]

Interviewees' perceptions of the value placed on evidence-based practice by their neighbourhood colleagues often underlined the disconnect between the learning and practice environment:

> *It's [EBP] not something that's really, from what I can see, is used at a local level. And actually trying to do it involves time and resourcing commitment that's not*

easy to do. But it's something that I would like, or I can see that it would be beneficial to do. [PNG08]

The feeling I got was that most people in policing don't know what it is [EBP]. That it is difficult in a day-to-day policing world to use it, because sometimes when we have our Police Now events, they are so far removed from everyday work. Yes. It is quite difficult to sometimes put it into practice in your everyday. [PNG09]

No one – which amazes me – no one is particularly strongly subscribed to evidence based policing, which when I was at the summer academy and we were talking about evidence based policing I was like, "why are spending so much time on this? It's such an obvious concept. Obviously, we should be doing things that are proved to have worked. Why would we be doing anything else?" But when you come into [neighbourhood team], it's not like that. [PNG18]

However, our interview findings also suggested that in some areas and with some police managers, the interest in evidence-based practice *had* taken root and was being supported both in practice and through additional training given to graduates, there was just no overall consistency in the Police Now graduates' experience in force:

I know it's something that the force has moved a lot more in the direction of using. We've had training from the force using an evidence-based approach to solve problems. I think that's a cultural thing where, over time, it's going to take a while, for people, I suppose, to come round to that approach. It's certainly used a lot more than I had perhaps expected when I first started. [PNG11]

A lot of people poo-poo it. Quite a few say, "It's more about experience than it is about academic research." [but] I think there is a wave of change coming in [PNG02].

The impact projects

The impact projects are arguably an important link between learning and practice in that these projects are an assessed aspect of the graduate programme, but they are also informed by and developed during everyday practice. The graduates had mixed views about the aims and usefulness of the impact projects. On the whole, these projects were seen as a distraction from enhancing *practical* or core policing skills; a view that echoed some of the police line managers we interviewed. Further, as illustrated in interview extracts below, there were some interviewees who thought the projects were largely being undertaken for promotional or publicity purposes for Police Now. A minority of interviewees were positive about the experience and perceived the 100-day impact projects as valuable for improving their policing practice and general employment skills:

I find them a bit of annoyance if I am being brutally honest. …it probably does help to focus your mind and actually allow you to reflect on what you are doing in

a way you probably wouldn't do without them. I think there is probably a bit of a double-edged sword there. I think when you are busy and you have got loads of things you want to be out and about doing at work, actually planning your 100 Day assessment doesn't always feel like the most important thing. [PNG11]

I think, that there is constant focus on trying to make Police Now look good to other people, to either raise investment or raise public profile perception. So you feel a bit like a guinea pig. [PNG28]

They're good, because [they] force you to analyse the impact that you've had. You can't just say- A lot of people, in job interviews, will fudge things. They'll go in and say, "Oh, I've done this, this, this, and this." Without actually mentioning whether it worked or not, and how they've evaluated the impact, and all that sort of stuff. With this, it kind of forces you to- Because you know that you need to be able to evidence the impact that you've had, it forces you to do things properly and plan things. [PNG30]

Based on their experiences of undertaking projects and some wider reflection on their purpose, interviewees offered some common suggestions for how these projects could be more usefully deployed. This also raised questions for us about how the impact projects could be better integrated with the wider aspirations of policing to develop the professional knowledge base. The current short-term focus on 100 days was thought by most interviewees to negate any impetus to review impact over the longer term or to use findings iteratively in order to develop and adapt interventions that may have worked elsewhere. One focus group participant raised the issue of legacy and a lack of clarity about how the research undertaken for impact projects will be useful in the longer-term:

You know, if what they're encouraging us to do is to look for long-term solutions and not just look for a quick fix... If you try something, and it doesn't have any impact for your first 100 days, the temptation is to be like, "Right, I'll move onto a different project, then, because I need some impacts. I'll find something that I can fix quickly." That's completely the antithesis of what they're trying to teach us, in terms of long-term problem solving..., there's some paradox there [PNG26]

Something that kind of demotivates me when I'm doing these projects is that I know that when I leave in July it will all revert back to normal, nothing will get carried on. So the legacy that we're creating now, no one's going to carry that on unless there's new [graduates] replacing us. [Participant, Focus Group 1]

A potentially misleading emphasis on *innovation* in solving neighbourhood problems and a perception (not necessarily supported by Police Now) among interviewees that documenting the failure of an intervention to address a specific problem would result in lower marks for the project, may have reduced the value of the exercise in the eyes of our interviewees.

I think is one of the falling down marks for policing in general is the fact that we can't accept failure, and I think that we really need to do that. I think the NHS do that really well, and I think that we do that very badly, and I would love to see that change, because I think that my presentation would be great if I felt comfortable going up there and saying, "Here's what I did, here's why it didn't work. [PNG18]

The pressure to succeed was also commented on by one of the police line managers we interviewed, who described being unconvinced by some of the impacts reported by graduates - "little bit of artistic license there". However, he was also interested in their ability to be innovative and had high expectations of those he was supervising. Coming up with new ideas was perceived as difficult in the context of neighbourhood policing:

These are people with no previous policing experience, who haven't been tarnished - perhaps that's the wrong word - but my hope was that they would look at [problem] with a complete fresh set of eyes and what I gave them were long-term issues. They weren't coming up with the new ideas I'd hoped for. [Line Manager 03]

It's a pressure to come up with something innovative and new, and sometimes it's to do with the job. There's not always something amazing that's going to come up. [Participant, Focus Group 2].

In our view, too much stress on innovation diminishes the impact projects' potential contribution to building professional knowledge, highlighting the need for greater coordination from the College of Policing about how graduate projects like these might be better used to develop and refine the policing evidence base. For example, alongside new approaches and ideas generated through such assessments, there is huge potential for projects to further test or adapt to 'local' conditions, interventions that have proved effective elsewhere. In the extract below, the perceived emphasis on *innovation* has actually served to reduce interest in What Works evidence:

I think because Police Now is so focused on innovation and doing things differently, which is great, it's a good thing to encourage but there's such a heavy focus on it that it makes you feel quite reluctant to look to the College of Policing because obviously that's all the tried and tested things. I think there's so much pressure to try to do something different that it sort of counteracts all of the resources that are suggested in those lectures because they're sort of saying, "Oh don't do what everyone else has done. [PNG14]

As noted, some graduates were assisted by line managers and colleagues in the design and implementation of their projects and these were sometimes linked in to current neighbourhood operations or based on neighbourhood priorities; two of the line managers we interviewed, reported that they determined the focus of the impact projects. Line

managers also assisted in most cases, but not all, by allowing time away from other duties to focus on projects. Additionally, some of the LDOs were credited with helping graduates develop project ideas. Overall, based on our interviewees' accounts, there was no standardised way in which graduates were assisted to complete their impact projects:

> *I think it is fair to say that [LDO] bounces questions to make us consider other options and make sure that we are considering evidence-based practice in what we are doing and that kind of thing.* [PNG11]

> *[LDO] is great to talk about what would be suitable for a 100-day impact event, where to look for the evidence base that I need to work on that sort of stuff.* [PNG19]

Assessment and feedback are important elements of learning and development. A few of the interviewees were dissatisfied with the quality of feedback they received on their impact projects from Police Now. This centred on two issues –the transparency of the marking protocol - so understanding how the project was being assessed - and the usefulness of the feedback:

> *It was anonymous feedback and I had no sense of how the [project] was being assessed.* [PNG02]

> *I don't know who does the marking, but I think if you have a teaching background it would be a lot more of an effective marking strategy. These guys don't, I don't think.* [PNG18]

> *It was useful to an extent but, this sounds awful, you know when you do well, and they don't give a huge amount of useful feedback because it's all mainly like, "Oh yes that was a good idea." It was useful in saying I'd done a good job but…* [PNG17]

Police Now has since developed a more detailed marking scheme for the impact projects but this had not been implemented at the time of our interviews.

The projects

We have reported above the context in which interviewees developed their understanding of evidence-based practice and how they applied this learning through their 100-day impact projects. We have also reviewed the content of the projects conducted by our 30 Police Now cohort 2 interviewees. These included only the projects completed by the time of our interviews – mainly those presented orally and in poster format. Project details are compiled in full in the Police Now Impact Library, which offers a potentially valuable source of information and research for neighbourhood policing. Below we present a descriptive overview of the interviewees' projects:

Topics for projects: The two most common topics for projects were anti-social behaviour in its various guises (street-drinking and drug use, noise, rough-sleeping) and improving community engagement (mainly engagement with young people but the elderly were also a focus) to build confidence and improve police and community relationships. Other issues tackled included the misuse of police time, reducing traffic offences, targeting street drug and sex markets and theft. Clearly there was significant cross-over in the types of problems covered.

In their presentations graduates often demonstrated the concerted attention they gave to a long-standing community issue. For example, focused attention on high demand individuals or households involved organising mediation, partnership working and referral and offering alternatives ways of communicating with the police to the misuse of 101 or 999 calls; for example, the development of social media and twitter for community and police communication.

Rationale for focus: This was variously described and influenced by neighbourhood priorities – often an increase in certain incidents as evidenced by force data -, current operations and the time and interest of the graduate. Most, however, provided some rationale for why the problem tackled was important in the longer term. For example, several focusing on community engagement, highlighted the importance for the police of building positive relationships with young people, to prevent or reduce ASB and future offending. Community engagement was also linked to good intelligence gathering and increasing public confidence in the service.

References to existing evidence that informed focus or design: Most commonly force data – Local authority data, crime data, police call-outs and residents' complaints were used to show why the issue was important and for assessment of impact. The advice of colleagues and line managers was also commonly sought and a few reported contacting others forces for advice about tacking a particular problem. Some referenced national policies, including government and National Police Chief Council guidance. Less frequent were references to academic research in building the case for, or design of a project. The SARA model, for identifying issues, designing and assessing responses was mentioned regularly as were the concepts of hot-spot policing and target-hardening.

Use of College of Policing resources: Those projects which acknowledged the use of the Crime Reduction Toolkit, Police Online Knowledge Area, Authorised Professional Practice or any other College of Policing resources were in a minority. Three graduates of the 30 we

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interviewed mentioned the College of Policing or the Crime Reduction Toolkit as a source of information in the development of their projects.

*Methods for measuring impact***:** This was unsurprisingly the weakest element of the projects, in part because of the lack of time or resources to undertake any assessment of impact. In some cases, the projects presented at the impact events were work in progress so may have reported impact measurement at a later stage. Data on police call outs and incident reports, both before and after an intervention, were commonly used to show change. In some cases, verbal anecdotal feedback or testimonies from residents or colleagues were presented. Only one project we reviewed, had attempted to compare data from the intervention site with a comparison site. However, most showed a good understanding of the difficulties of measuring impact and also the likely short-term nature of change and some consideration for how any positive impact might be sustained over the longer term.

In summary

Our interviews with Police Now graduates and their police line mangers about their experiences of this programme, highlight some important learning points for developing the graduate conversion route into policing.

- While our interviewees could largely cope with learning over a more condensed period of time and were happy to complete some of these elements independently, there was a general call for more opportunity for discussion and reflection alongside lecture-style learning during the Summer Academy. This might also help reinforce connection between the more theoretical or 'soft-skills' aspects of the training curriculum and policing practice.

- Common concerns about a lack of practical knowledge or skill on completion of the Summer Academy could be addressed through better coordination between Police Now and host forces about expectations of the immersion and mentoring period and clearer plans for how graduates' practice will be developed in force and via additional training and learning sessions from Police Now.

- There is good research evidence (Belur et al; Agnew Pauley and Belur) regarding the importance of effective partnerships between Higher Education Institutions and practice organisations to develop mutual agreements and formalised understandings prior to

graduate placement, about their respective responsibilities for learning and development, and for continued cooperation *throughout* the conversion period. Our feedback from graduates highlighted a lack of consistency in what support was offered locally and some evidence of poor communication among key partners.

- Professionalisation of the Police service prioritises the role of research evidence. Professional practice shaped by evidence-based knowledge enables professions to ensure strategic planning and individual officer performance is informed by relevant, up-to-date knowledge about 'what works'. This is reliant on factors including: a willingness to embrace evidence-based policing at all levels of the organisation and effective partnerships between academics, researchers, HEIs and the police. The revised PEQF forms a key part of the professionalisation process. Our interviewees as PN graduates are expected to apply and promote evidence-based practice but there are various impediments to this, including the lack of support for EBP in some of the neighbourhood areas. This has obvious implications for the development of research-informed practice.

- The impact projects aim to enhance graduates' problem-solving skills and to apply research to challenge 'received wisdom' or to test more innovative approaches to neighbourhood problems. There is clear scope for re-thinking how these projects are done and, in particular, how graduates can add to the professional knowledge base through conducting research and testing or re-testing interventions locally. This requires coordination from the service and the College of Policing to ensure such information is captured and disseminated.